



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

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DOES LEAD DEER HARVEST FOR FOURTH YEAR IN A ROW

BOONE – Iowa hunters reported 150,552 deer harvested during the 2006-07 hunting seasons, with the most deer taken from Clayton County – 7,389, and the least from Calhoun County – 159. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has posted the results of the reported deer harvest by season, sex, and county at www.iowadnr.gov.

“The reported deer harvest totals should be taken as a minimum number, not as an exact number,” said Willie Suchy, wildlife research supervisor for the DNR. “The number will not include the deer that were wounded and not recovered, any hunters who became frustrated with the reporting system and those who simply were not going to report, regardless of the circumstances. But it does give us information that we can build on.”

Does filled 51.8 percent (77,946) of the tags that were reported. Hunters reported harvesting 58,653 bucks and 13,953 button bucks, which are young bucks occasionally mistaken for does.

Suchy said the information, when combined with the deer population surveys, will help with setting the antlerless deer quotas by county and other deer hunting seasons.

For more information, contact Steve Roberts at 515-432-2823.

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[Electronic photo available]

FOR IOWA'S FLYING TIGER --- SPRING NESTING SEASON HAS ARRIVED

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

If you're among those currently afflicted with cabin fever --- take heart. Signs of spring are at hand. For at least one Iowa bird species, the annual nesting season has already begun.

Okay, I know what you're thinking. It's only February, the ground is white, and we're still being pummeled by freezing temperatures. It's the dead of winter and the majority of the birds that will rear their young in Iowa this year are still hundreds or more miles to the south.

Be that as it may, there is one astonishing exception. An Iowa bird that is so rugged, so incredibly indestructible, and so completely weather proof that females of the species are already in the process of laying this year's clutch of eggs.

The bird in question, of course, is the great horned owl. Throughout its range, the great horned is the very first bird to begin nesting each year. The deep, resonate vocalizations [hooting] of courting owls can be heard by December and the first eggs appear around mid-February. As late season storms roll across the heartland, brooding females often find themselves buried beneath several inches of new snow.

Horned owls build no nests of their own, but appropriate structures previously constructed by crows or hawks. Horned owls will also utilize natural tree cavities or bowl-shaped depressions found atop dead snags.

When the need arises, the species can also exhibit an amazing degree of adaptability. At Hancock County's Eagle Lake, owls have successfully reared their young in over-the-water nesting platforms designed for breeding geese. At Dubuque's Eagle Point Park, horned owls successfully nest each year in crevices that dot a 200-foot cliff face overlooking the Mississippi River.

While observing the Eagle Point owls over a period of two summers, I discovered them to be unique in more ways than one. One of the most unusual traits was that their entire diet appeared to be derived from a thriving population of bats who frequent the network of narrow cracks and fissures that run the entire length of the cliff. Just before sunset each day, the owls would began their hunting forays by probing likely looking fissures with one grapple-hooked foot while clinging to the vertical cliff wall with the other.

Whenever a bat was located, the hapless creature was impaled on a talon and then immediately delivered to the clamoring, recently fledged young owls who waited in the shaded parts of the rock. As darkness descended and the bat hordes became active, the adults would switch tactics and effectively pursue their victims on the wing. By summer's end, the youngsters were well on their way to mastering these bizarre bat-hunting techniques for themselves.

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PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS MOUNTAIN LION SIGHTINGS

WEBSTER CITY - The Hamilton County Conservation Board and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will hold a meeting to discuss mountain lion/cougar sightings at the Hamilton County Conservation offices, at Briggs Woods County Park, two miles south of Webster City, on Hwy. 17. The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., on March 7, and is open to the public.

The purpose of the meeting is to inform the public about mountain lion/cougar reports in the area, throughout the state and nation. Since 2000, three mountain lions have been killed in Iowa, including one road-killed near Harlan, one shot near Ireton and one shot in south central Iowa, near Chariton. Hundreds of other sightings have been reported.

Ron Andrews, furbearer resource specialist with the Iowa DNR will present the program, along with local DNR and Hamilton County Conservation Board staff. Topics will include verifying mountain lion/cougar sightings, what to do if you encounter a mountain lion/cougar, what is happening in other states and other related topics.

One point Andrews stresses is, the Iowa DNR has not, did not, and will not release mountain lions/cougars in Iowa.

There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion following the formal presentation. The public is encouraged and invited to attend this meeting and to invite other interested people to attend.

For more information on cougars, contact Andrews at 641-425-5088 or by email at Ron.Andrews@dnr.state.ia.us.

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IOWA OUTDOORS MAGAZINE SHARES DNR PICKS FOR SPRING'S BEST FISHING SPOTS

Does cold weather have you itching for a warm-up and a chance to cast your fishing line? Then turn to *Iowa Outdoors* magazine for the 2007 Iowa fishing forecast. The March/April 2007 issue is being mailed to subscribers this week.

"If you want to know the best places to catch fish in Iowa, then you ask a DNR fisheries biologist," said Mick Klemesrud, *Iowa Outdoors* magazine contributing writer.

That is just what Klemesrud did to compile this in-depth list of where to fish, what bait to use and the size of fish you can expect to catch at some of Iowa's best fishing holes.

"Whether you are new to fishing or are a seasoned angler, we tried to offer tips and tricks to help you improve your luck," said Klemesrud. "Most of all, we share with Iowans the best hotspots in Iowa for catching fish."

The Fishing Forecast details the top places to catch specific fish species in March and April. For example, April is a great time to fish for walleyes as they prepare to spawn. According to *Iowa Outdoors* magazine, the Wapsipincon River below the dams in Anamosa, Central City and Troy Mills will be a place where walleyes will gather to spawn, and can be caught on a jig and minnow. Storm Lake and Clear Lake will also offer top walleye fishing opportunities this spring.

Fishing hotspots for May and June will be detailed in upcoming magazine issues, according to Klemesrud.

There's still time to get your March/April edition of *Iowa Outdoors* magazine by subscribing today at www.iowaoutdoorsmagazine.com, or calling 1-800-361-8072.

Iowa Outdoors magazine is published six times a year by the Department of Natural Resources. Annual subscriptions cost \$12.

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CROSS COUNTRY SKIERS WELCOMED FEBRUARY SNOW

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For cross country skiers, the drought is over. Same for snowshoers, snowmobilers and 'snow-others' who need more than a thin coat of the stuff to chase their hobbies across the fields, parks or trails. Near-balmy conditions for most of December and part

of January have given way to a base of snow. Last week's powdery topcoat added a great surface for skiing.

Most cross country skiers aim towards trails; first to lay down tracks after a snowfall, or settling into the grooves of those before them. Others 'break trail' and head away from the pre-set route to explore the wilder (but more obstacle-strewn) side of the outdoors.

If you're a beginner, it's best to keep it simple. Start by strapping on the tools of the trade. "The newer versions of skis are shorter and wider. You go by how much you weigh, not how tall you are," explains Wayne Fett. "If your skis are too short, they will drag. There will be no glide. If they're too long, it will be hard to climb, when you get to a grade." With the University of Iowa's 'Touch the Earth' program, Fett deals with absolute beginners, as well as intermediate students who want to learn more.

Fett says the pole handle should touch the top of your shoulder, as the point touches ground. Shoes should fit comfortably. You'll need special ski shoes or boots to fit into the ski bindings. Stick with it, and you'll want to add gaiters, special gloves and other ski-specific gear. With those basic pieces, though—and as long as you are dressed for the weather—you're ready for the next step.

Fett has students start without the poles. "For the first hour, they learn to initiate the leg action. Then, when we add the arms (and poles) they naturally swing their arms; keeping the baskets (the circle just above the point) behind them," says Fett. The biggest mistake he sees? Novice skiers trying to pull themselves with the poles, rather than pushing as they glide.

For best results, work with some one who knows. Find an area that runs from flat to gentle slopes, not steep, but with a little uphill and downhill grade. Open areas in parks are great. So are golf courses and pastures—remembering that permission is required on private property. Groomed areas, though, are tough to beat. The U of I's Macbride field campus offers 15 kilometers of groomed trails, many of them old county roads on the Nature campus, between North Liberty and Solon. "They're wide enough. They're groomed, with tracks set. Anyone from beginner to expert can ski on them," says Fett. Many local skiers also use the Ashton cross country field, on the University's west campus.

Trail width is important, as you negotiate a turn. Those skis can seem like tent poles as you coax tangled legs and skis around brush and logs, on a routine 45-degree turn. That is a shortcoming on the more scenic hiking areas, with woods and slopes. Keep in mind how steep the slopes are and how much trouble there might be making the turns on those skis. Those hiking trails are excellent, though, for snowshoes and plain old cold weather hiking, where turning radius is not critical.

Once underway, just go for it. "It's like (deciding to) walk and jog or run. If you feel comfortable going fast, try it," says Fett. "The more you ski, the more comfortable

you get.” You’ll stay more comfortable in the long run, if you dress for the workout. A 150-pound person can burn 20 calories a minute, working uphill; 10 to 15 calories a minute on flat terrain. “(Cross country) skiing is the most aerobic sport that most people will ever do,” reminds Fett.

You should also wear lightweight clothes; something to block the wind, but wicks perspiration away from your body (no cotton!). That means layering clothes; maybe even starting a little underdressed, so you are comfortable as you warm up to trail speed.

Just make sure your coat or a warm vehicle is close by when you stop, and the sweating doesn’t.

Get outside and ‘Touch the Earth’

Snowshoes, kayaks and backpacking might not jump out at students as they go through the University of Iowa course catalog. Look a little past Intro to Psych and Biology, though, and you can pick up outdoor skills that will stick with you for decades.

Offered through the University’s Recreation Services department, the ‘Touch the Earth’ program is designed to get participants outside...and active. “It’s year round academic classes, through Lifetime Leisure Skills,” explains senior associate director Wayne Fett. “A lot of students don’t plan on it, but when they find out they can do it and get a credit for it...everything from rock climbing to bicycle tours, cross country skiing, kayaking.”

Field trips put that learning to the test. Last month, a group snowshoed and backpacked at Yellowstone National Park. This spring, another group will head to Moab, Utah for mountain biking.

A rental program, offering everything from toboggans and canoes to backpack gear, tents and mountain bikes. Find out more by going to www.recserv.uiowa.edu and click on ‘programs’.

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